

## Which Mountain Will You Ascend?

Luke 9:28-36 Text vs. 35 *“A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”*

Have you ever felt like you were on top of the world? Really happy? Able to solve any problems that come up? You felt close to God. In tune with His plan for your life. You were excited and alive! Everything seemed new and refreshing. Well, moments like that always seem to come when something exciting happens in your life. Graduation. Baptism. The first day at a new job. Your wedding. The birth of your child. Even catching your very first fish out in the Ten Thousand Islands. They all seem to have been something almost spiritual to you. They're called *"mountain top experiences!"* Events you wish would last forever. You don't want to come down off your mountain! You just want to hang on to that moment for as long as you can.

And that's our Scripture lesson today. It happened to Peter during his mountain top experience with Jesus. It was the time of confirmation and affirmation of Jesus' ministry and was one of the most profound and awe-inspiring events in the life of Jesus, other than His resurrection from the dead. His Transfiguration. His transformation. The change we just read about in Luke 9:28-36 was where a glimpse into the Divine nature of Jesus was given and offers a valuable lesson for your spiritual journey. It was a moment in time when Jesus was confirmed as a Divine Being and it was revealed to His closest disciples – Peter, John, and James.

They had gone with Jesus up a mountain to pray when suddenly, Jesus' appearance changed. His clothes became dazzling white. It was a powerful reminder of His holiness, purity, and divine glory! Jesus was not just a great teacher or prophet. He was the Son of God! Fully divine! Yet, fully human. And as the disciples stood witnessing this extraordinary event happening right before their eyes, a cloud overshadowed them. A voice came out of the cloud saying, *"This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him!"* It was a call to recognize Jesus' authority. To trust His teachings by emphasizing the importance of following Jesus. Seeking His guidance. Listening to His voice in the midst of the noise of the world.

And it was the same voice and message Jesus had received at His baptism by John in the Jordan River. This experience, though physical, was also a spiritual one. Clearly, it was a preview of resurrected life. Life in the future that will be physical, yet-to-be-disclosed *how?* But what *was* being disclosed *here* was, our bodies *will* be transformed. Not so we won't be able to communicate or be recognized as we are now. What's now is "ordinary." It's without *glory*. *Then*, it will glow! Life will not be hidden. It will be *glorious*.

And during the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus about His upcoming departure - His crucifixion. His resurrection from the dead. And His ascension to heaven. This 'departure' - His crucifixion - would deliver His people from their bondage to sin and death and would complete the work of both Moses and Elijah. Moses represented the Law. And Elijah represented the Prophets. Their presence with Jesus on that mountaintop revealed that Jesus *was* the fulfillment of both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Jesus *was* the promised Messiah! The One who to come and fulfill God's plan of salvation. Moses and Elijah suffered and were rejected by the people. But Jesus would endure suffering and rejection at a deeper level. He would endure the suffering of the cross. The rejection of the people who He had come to save. He felt separated from God when on the cross He cried out, *"My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me?"* He took upon Himself the punishment for the sins of the world.

Now, this is where the Transfiguration helped strengthen the faith of Peter, John, and James. Each faced distinct challenges and sufferings in their ministries. James was the first of the apostles to be martyred. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome at his own request, as he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. John was the only apostle to die of natural causes. He is believed to have lived to an old age, spending his later years in Ephesus. He survived being plunged into boiling oil unharmed, leading to his exile on the island of Patmos, where he is said to have written the Book of Revelation. That glimpse of Jesus' Divine glory prepared them for the challenges they would face as His followers. The Transfiguration experience reassured them, Jesus' ultimate victory over death was His Divine nature. Likewise, during your own faith journey, you may encounter moments of doubt and difficulty.

But the Transfiguration should remind you to hold on to your faith. Trust in God's plan. I once heard someone say that sometimes when they open their mouth, they put their foot in it! Do you ever say, or do anything on the spur of the moment and then wish you hadn't! Perhaps Peter felt that way about his impulsive behavior. As Moses and Elijah were leaving the mountaintop, Peter said to Jesus, *"Master, it is good for us to be here. Let's put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."* Peter was showing his joy in that experience. And he wanted to prolong it by making temporary shelters up there, like those erected during the Israelites' 40-year journey through the desert after their Exodus from Egypt. They lived in temporary shelters or "tabernacles" during that time. And verse 33 clearly shows it had a deep effect upon Peter and suggests Peter was so amazed by this experience he thought it should be a permanent arrangement where they could continually visit that mountaintop.

The true majesty and glory of Jesus was no longer hidden by His humanity. You can imagine that later on as they were being persecuted, Peter, James and John were encouraged by remembering this transfiguration. It reconfirmed their witnessing for Jesus.

However, Moses' climb to Mt. Sinai for the 10 Commandments was quite different than the one we see here at Christ's glorious transfiguration. One was in fear and trembling to hear the voice of God speaking His thunderous disapprovals. The other was the forgiving grace and love of God in the person of Jesus. Is your Christian journey making a difference in how you approach life? Do you live your life in fear and dread of the law of Moses? Or do you live in the wonder and peace and joy of the grace of God. Which Mountain will you ascend?

What can you take away from this lesson today? This story reveals the majesty of Jesus. But there's danger in referring to Jesus of being just a *good man*. Of being too familiar with him. Seeing Him as just a friend, without realizing - He is God! That makes the Transfiguration a reminder that hidden within His human body was the fullness of God. The glory. The splendor. The majesty of God. And that should lead you to fear and wonder. Self-examination makes you realize just how *impure* your life is in contrast with the *shining white* of His righteousness. His truth deserves your honor. Your praise. And your worship. Your wholehearted dedication. When you help out at church. . . . When you live and share your faith. . . . You're not doing it for the Pastor, the church, or yourself. You're doing it for the Lord Jesus Christ! And remember, you can have a meeting with Him at any time. Because He is alive today! He may not appear to you in the same way as He did to those three disciples. But He still reveals Himself today!

When you ascend your own "mountain of transfiguration" you're not seeking rules. You're wanting a closer personal relationship with Jesus Himself! Read your Bible about His life and of the lives of His disciples. Both the Old and New Testament people trusted God by seeking His righteousness in the midst of unmanageable lives in a sin-filled world. They didn't need rules to make their lives better. They knew they were sinners through and through. And they spent time confessing their sins to God and to one another. They also knew Jesus went to the cross bearing their own sins. And it was by faith in Him their sins were completely removed, and they could approach life knowing they will probably mess things up, but God will work things out for them. In times of sickness, marital or family distress, personal failure or danger, turn to Jesus with a prayer for strength and joy at being found worthy of suffering like your Lord did. Don't look for success like the world sees it! Those early Christians weren't being rescued from suffering. They knew the Lord Jesus was right there beside them to *transfigure* them. To change their suffering.

Now, the question for you today is the same question I asked at the beginning, "*Which mountain will you ascend?*" Even more personally, *Which mountain are you going to ascend?* Jesus calls you to join Him on that mountain of grace and peace. But your sinful nature keeps looking for answers from Moses' mountain of the Law. Give up that climb to the Law. Join Jesus on the mountain of grace. There's a cross up there on which our Savior bled and died to free you from that sin. Make your climb carefully, but joyfully, to the mountain of Jesus' love and forgiveness. And you will find a transfigured life, a changed life, a life that is fuller and richer than any set of rules will ever reveal. Let us pray.

Dear Lord when we are on our mountaintop with Jesus, we are amazed and astounded by His glory. Help us remember to always go back down to where the people of God dwell. Where pain flourishes. Where blessings flow. Where this world's hurt resides. Give us boldness to reach out our hands and our hearts in love with whatever pain we face or experience. And as we do, may we always be in the presence and the greatness of God. In the Name of Jesus. AMEN